

مختصر حليّة طالب العلم

The Abridged ‘Regalia of the Seeker of Knowledge’

Shaykh Bakr Abu Zayd (d. 1429H / 2008CE), may Allah have mercy on him

Written in 1408H / 1987CE

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Chapter 1

The Etiquette of the Seeker's Inner Self

1) Knowledge is worship¹

Some scholars said "knowledge is a secretive prayer and worship of the heart." The conditions of any act of worship are two.

i. Sincerity of intention

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

"And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion..."²

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

"Actions are but by intentions..."³

ii. Following the Prophet صلى الله عليه و سلم

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"Say, [O Muhammad], "If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.""⁴

¹ Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya (10/11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 49-54) (11/314) (20/77-78)

² Surat Al-Bayyinah 98:5

³ Agreed upon (Muttafaqun alayh)

⁴ Surat Aali Imran 3:31

2) Following the methodology of the best of generations (خير القرون) in their approach to the religion

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَالسَّابِقُونَ الْأَوَّلُونَ مِنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ
اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتَهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا
ذَٰلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

“And the first forerunners [in the faith] among the Muhajireen and the Ansar and those who followed them with good conduct - Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the great attainment.”⁵

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ
مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصْلِهِ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

“And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers - We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination.”⁶

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

خَيْرُ النَّاسِ قَرْنِي، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ

“The best of people are my generation, then those who succeed them, then those who succeed them...”⁷

3) Commitment to fearing Allah سبحانه و تعالى

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ وَيَعْلَمُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

“...And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knowing of all things.”⁸

⁵ Surat At-Tawbah 9:100

⁶ Surat An-Nisa 4:115

⁷ Sahih Al-Bukhari

⁸ Surat Al-Baqara 2:282

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

“Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge.”⁹

Ali ibn Abi Talib رضي الله عنه said “knowledge calls for action, so either the call is answered or knowledge takes off.”¹⁰

Imam Ahmad said “the foundation of knowledge is fear of Allah the Most High.”

4) Continual observance of Allah

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا

وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

“Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course - the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.”¹¹

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ
وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

“The believers are only the ones who have believed in Allah and His Messenger and then doubt not but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of Allah. It is those who are the truthful.”¹²

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

قُلْ آمَنْتُ بِاللَّهِ فَاسْتَقِمْ

“Say: ‘I affirm my belief in Allah and remain steadfast.’¹³

⁹ Surat Fatir 35:28

¹⁰ *Al-Jami li Akhlaq Ar-Rawi wa Adab As-Sami*, Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi; *Dham man la Ya'malu bi Ilmih*, Ibn Asakir

¹¹ Surat Fussilat 41:30

¹² Surat Al-Hujurat 49:15

¹³ Sahih Muslim

5) Lowering your wing;¹⁴ putting arrogance and pride behind you

Al-Imam Adh-Dhahabi رحمه الله narrated in the biography of 'Amr ibn al-Aswad al-'Ansi رحمه الله who died in the khilafah of 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan رحمه الله "that when he was leaving the masjid he took his left hand with his right, so when he was asked about this he replied: 'out of fear that my hand will make a gesture of hypocrisy.' I say (adh-Dhahabi): He held it out of fear that his hand would swing [in a manner that indicates pride]; for such an action is considered haughtiness."¹⁵

Abdullah ibn al-Imam al-Hujjah Bakr ibn 'Abdillah al-Muzani رحمه الله said: "I heard a person narrate that when my father was standing on Mount 'Arafah, he became soft-hearted and said: 'If I wasn't among them [i.e. one of the congregation], I would have said that they have been forgiven.'" Adh-Dhahabi narrated it, then said: "I say: in this way the slave [of Allah] should pity himself and swallow his pride."¹⁶

6) Contentment and Asceticism

"Zuhd [is] in the haram (unlawful) and to distance yourself from its boundaries by abstaining from the shubuhāt (the matters of halal and haram that are unclear) and wishing for what is in people's possession."¹⁷

Al-Imam Ash-Shaafi'i رحمه الله said: "If a person [sincerely] advised the wisest of people; he would encourage him to be amongst the ascetic people (by becoming one of them)."¹⁸

Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ash-Shaybani رحمه الله was asked, "Will you not write a book on zuhd?" He replied, "I have written a book on transactions."¹⁹

Imam Muhammad Al-Amin Ash-Shinqiti رحمه الله said "I came from my country (Shinqit, Mauritania) and with me is a treasure that is very seldom found in the possession of anyone. It is contentment. If I wanted high status, I would have known the way to achieve it, but I chose not to exchange this worldly life for the hereafter and I do not give my knowledge to attain worldly desires."

7) Adorning yourself with the splendour of knowledge

The seeker of knowledge should be the embodiment of beautiful manners and pious conduct.

Ibn Sirin رحمه الله said, "the pious predecessors used to learn manners as they would learn the knowledge."

¹⁴ I.e. being humble

¹⁵ *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala*, Adh-Dhahabi (4/80)

¹⁶ *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala*, Adh-Dhahabi (4/534)

¹⁷ *Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim*, Az-Zarnuji, p.28

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi رحمه الله said,

“It is incumbent upon the seeker of hadith to refrain from play, idle fiddling, and displaying vulgar manners in the gatherings by acting foolishly, giggling, laughing loudly, or excessive and continual joking. For indeed joking is only permissible if it is in small amounts, and if it is occasional, and subtle, and the type that does not exceed the boundaries of good manners, and the way of knowledge. As for continual joking [and that which is] vulgar and foolish and that which arouses bitter feelings and attracts evil, then it is blameworthy. Excessive joking and laughing degrades your rank and your honour.”²⁰

Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays رحمه الله said: “Preserve your gatherings from the mention of women and food, for indeed I hate a man who describes his private parts and his stomach.”²¹

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

الْمُتَشَبِّعُ بِمَا لَمْ يُعْطَ كَلَا بَسٍ تَوْبَىٰ زُورٍ

“One who creates a false impression of being given what one has not, is like a wearer of two garments of falsehood.”²²

8) Adorning yourself with good etiquette

Embody the qualities of good etiquette, such as good manners, a cheerful face, spreading the salaam (the salutation), showing forbearance with people, having self-esteem without being haughty, strength which is free from tyranny, and being gallant but not for the sake of zealous partisanship, and being zealous without it being the zealotry of the Time of Ignorance.

Avoid that which may tarnish your good etiquette, whether it be [in your] nature, speech, or actions. Avoid indulging in degrading actions or evil habits such as conceit, boastfulness, arrogance and being seen in doubtful places.

9) Embodying chivalrous qualities

Embody chivalrous qualities which include bravery, forthrightness, noble manners and giving for the sake of good causes until the ambitions of men [die] before reaching your level.

Equally, beware of the qualities that oppose them such as being unconfident, impatient and weak in nobility. For indeed they destroy knowledge, and cut off the tongue from speaking the truth.

²⁰ *Al-Jami* (1/156)

²¹ *As-Siyar* (4/94)

²² Agreed upon

10) Forsaking luxury

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

البَذَاذَةُ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ

“Asceticism is from Iman.”²³

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab رضى الله عنه said, “So beware of [excessive] comfort, and imitating the appearance of the 'ajam (non-Arabs). Rather, be rough and tough...”²⁴

The clothing of the seeker of knowledge should be appropriate to the situation and context, since the outer appearance expresses oneself to others. People initially characterise those they meet according to dress, so one should be wary of dressing in a way that causes a bad first impression.

The dress of the seeker should beautify him without being extravagant, such that he gives no one an excuse to criticize or gossip about him. It should match the nobility of the knowledge he possesses, the better to take him seriously, since it is a means of calling the people to Allah the Almighty and guiding them to the Truth.

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab رضى الله عنه said, “It is more beloved to me to see the learned person in white garment”²⁵

11) Avoiding the gatherings of vain speech

It is a crime against knowledge and its people for a seeker to be present in the gatherings of those that commit vice and immorality.

12) Avoiding commotion (hayshaat)

The author of *Al-Wasit fi Udaba Shinqit* and from it in *Mu'jam al-Ma'ajim* writes “that a conflict took place between two tribes, so a third tribe came to arbitrate between them. They finally agreed to the religious rulings and they betook a scholar as a judge, who passed a judgement that four people should be killed from one of the tribes [in return] for the death of four people killed by the other tribe. So Shaykh Bab ibn Ahmad said: In such situation the law of Islamic requital is not applicable. So the judge replied: Such a decision is not to be found in any book, so the Shaykh said: Rather, it is found in every book, so the judge said to him this is the Qamus (the famous Arabic dictionary) - meaning that it comes under the category of a book. So the Shaykh took al-Qamus, and the first thing his sight fell upon was: al-Hayshah (riotous uproar), is civil strife... and there is no requital in riotous uproar (i.e. when a person who is killed in civil strife and their killer is not known). And the people became astonished at his speed in summoning up such information in such a crucial situation.”

²³ *As-Silsilat As-Sahihah*, Al-Albani, hadith #341

²⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Awana, Abd Ar-Razzaq and others

²⁵ *Al-Ihkam*, Al-Qarafi, p. 271

13) Adorning yourself with gentleness

Adhere to being gentle in speech, avoiding harsh words, for gentle speech wins over hostile personalities. And the proofs from the Qur'an and Sunnah on this topic are abundant.

14) Contemplation

It is said: "contemplate and you will reach."

Therefore, think before you speak. What am I going to say? What will be the consequences of my speech?

Be careful of how you phrase what you are saying. Convey what you want to say without going to any extremes or fanciness. Carefully consider what words to use when you are thinking about how to articulate your thoughts. Also think carefully when you are asked a question, so that you understand the question in its correct context.

15) Steadfastness and prudence

Adorn yourself with firmness and prudence, especially in calamities and serious situations. Part of this is patience and firmness during the long, difficult process of seeking knowledge from the scholars "for whosoever is firm will grow."

Chapter 2

The Methodology of Seeking Knowledge

16) The stages of seeking Sacred Knowledge

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مُكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا

“And [it is] a Qur'an which We have separated [by intervals] that you might recite it to the people over a prolonged period. And We have sent it down progressively.”²⁶

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً ۖ كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ ۖ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا

“And those who disbelieve say, "Why was the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?" Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly.”²⁷

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۚ

“Those to whom We have given the Book recite it with its true recital. They [are the ones who] believe in it...”²⁸

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ بِالتَّعَلُّمِ

“Knowledge is only attained through studiousness...”²⁹

It is said that “whoever does not perfect the foundation is prevented from reaching (his destination i.e. knowledge.)”

²⁶ Surat Al-Isra 17:106

²⁷ Surat Al-Furqan 25:32

²⁸ Surat Al-Baqara 2:121

²⁹ Al-Jami As-Saghir, As-Suyuti, hadith #2577

It is also said that “whoever wants to attain knowledge in one go, will lose it in one go.”

It is also said that “overcrowding knowledge in the ear misguides understanding.”

The seeker should make the following his *modus operandi* with every subject he studies:

- i. Memorise a primer on the subject.
- ii. Master it by studying under a proficient teacher.
- iii. Not engage with larger works or works that span several subjects until mastering the basics.
- iv. Not swap from one book to another without necessity, since this is a sign of impatience.
- v. Take proper notes.
- vi. Mentally prepare himself to seek and progress in seeking knowledge. Also, to have zeal in attaining increasingly higher levels until he progresses into the largest works with ease.

It was the opinion of Ibn Al-Arabi Al-Maliki that the seeker should not mix between two subjects while studying, that priority should be given to learning Arabic, poetry and mathematics, then the Qur'an. He was rebuked by Ibn Khaldun who said that the (then) present day customs did not encourage this method, and that the first priority should be given to memorizing and studying the Quran.

Among the scholars were those who taught Hanbali fiqh from Zad Al-Mustaqni for the beginners, Al-Muqni for difference of opinion within the madhab and then Al-Mughni for differences at an advanced level. They did not permit the beginners to sit with the intermediate class and so on, in order to eliminate confusion.

As for studying two or more subjects simultaneously, this depends on the aptitude of the seeker and his enthusiasm.

The list of primers and larger texts used as curricula will differ regionally, based on madhab and proficiency of the teachers in certain books over others.

After memorizing the Qur'an and learning tajweed, the seeker progresses through the stages of seeking knowledge, beginner, intermediate and advanced, continuing on this path until he meets His Lord.

Al-Hafidh³⁰ 'Uthman Ibn Khurrazadh (died 282AH) رحمه الله said that “the person associated to hadith is in need of five qualities, and if one of them is lost then it is considered as a deficiency; [he is] in need of a good mind, piety, precision, proficiency in this field, as well as being well known for his trustworthiness.”

Adh-Dhahabi رحمه الله commented on it, saying “trustworthiness is a portion of the *deen* (piety), and precision is included in proficiency; so what a hafidh really needs, is to be: fearful (of Allah), intelligent, grammatical, a linguist, righteous, modest, salafi, and it is sufficient enough for him to write two hundred volumes and to gather five hundred reliable compilations (books), and not to become fatigued by seeking knowledge till death, with sincerity and humility, otherwise let him not trouble himself.”

³⁰ A title given to someone who has memorized vast quantities of ahadith along with their chains

Al-Taj As-Subki رحمه الله said that "some people claimed being well versed in Hadith while in fact their knowledge did not exceed reading *Mashariq Al-Anwar* of Al Saghani, and if they sought higher rank they would read *Al-Masabih* of Al-Baghawi, thinking by that they reached the rank of Muhaddith while, in fact, they assume that just because they are ignorant in Hadith. In fact, if those people memorized by heart these two books and memorized on top of that double what is in them, they will not be Muhaddith, and will only be in this rank only if the camel entered the eye of the needle. And, if they worked harder and studied *Jami Al-Usul* of Ibn Kathir and *Sciences of Hadeeth* of Ibn As-Salah or even the abridged version of it known as *Al-Taqrīb wa 't-Taysir* of An-Nawawi and such alike books, you find them called Muhaddith of all Muhaddithin and the Bukhari of this era and such titles that are falsely attributed to them. This is because whoever does all what I have mentioned will not qualify him to be a Muhaddith. The Muhaddith is he who knows the chains of narrators and defects, the names of narrators, the high chains and low chains, and memorised numerous mutoon and heard from scholars the six books of Hadeeth in addition to Musnad Ahmad, Sunan Al Bayhaqi, Mujaam Al Tabarani, and on the top of all that he memorised 1000 juz of ahadith. This is the least rank and if he heard from scholars all what I mentioned and wrote the tibat and studied under scholars of hadeeth and taught defects of hadeeth, deaths of narrators, and masanid he will be in the first rank of Muhaddith, and Allah increases in knowledge whoever He wants."

17) Acquiring knowledge from qualified teachers

The basis of acquiring knowledge is by way of learning from qualified teachers and not through books alone. Sacred Knowledge is acquired through transmission, not autodidact-ism. The student-teacher chain that leads back to the Prophet صلى الله عليه و سلم is the mechanism by which Allah تعالى سبحانه و سبحانه preserves and defends His religion against revisionism, innovation (bid'ah) and heresy (zandaqa.)

It is said that "whoever enters knowledge alone, will emerge alone."³¹ (i.e. he comes out without knowledge accompanying him.)

It is also said that "from the greatest afflictions and tribulations are those who become 'scholars' through the parchments." (i.e. from before they had books.)

There is almost a consensus on this point, except for a tiny minority of scholars who disagreed. E.g. Al-Imam Adh-Dhahabi رحمه الله said about Ali Ibn Ridwan Al-Misri At-Tabib رحمه الله in his biography that "he did not have a *shaykh*. Rather he engaged himself in taking from the books and he wrote a book about acquiring a skill by reading from the books and how it is more prosperous for the learner. This is wrong."³²

Al-Imam Ash-Shafi'i رحمه الله said that "whoever seeks Sacred Knowledge from the belly of books will let the rulings go to waste."³³ (i.e. by not understanding them or applying them correctly.)

³¹ *Al-Jawahir wa 'd-Durar*, As-Sakhawi (1/57)

³² *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala*, Adh-Dhahabi (18/105); for more on this issue refer to *Sharh Al-Ihya* (1/66), *Bughyat Al-Wu'at* (1/131,286), *Shadharat Adh-Dhahab* (5/11), *Al-Ghunya*, Qadi Iyad (p. 16-17)

³³ *Tadhkirat As-Sami wa 'l-Mutakallim*, Ibn Jama'a, p. 87

Al-Imam Az-Zubaydi رحمه الله said in *Sharh Al-Ihya* “there are things that exist in the book that divert from knowledge that are non-existent in the teacher. They may be due to distortion that occurs due to the resemblance of the letters, the absence of vowels, the mistakes that occur due to straying of the eyes, lack of experience in *i’rab* (i.e. implementing the rules of Arabic grammar), corruption of the existing book, handwriting that cannot be read or reading that which is not written, not knowing the *madhab* of the author, poor quality of the scripts, poor transcription, lack of stopping at the correct punctuation, mixing up terminology of different subjects, using the terminology of one subject in context of another and the existence of Greek terminology [that] the writer did not take from the [Arabic] language. All of the things mentioned obstruct knowledge and the learner is relieved of them when he reads to the teacher. If the situation is such, then reading to the scholars is more advantageous and virtuous than personal study, and this is what we wanted to explain...As-Safadi said: ‘For this reason the scholars said: do not take knowledge from a person who acquires it from the scripts, and do not take the Qur'an from a person who has recited the Qur'an from the *mushaf*. Meaning: do not recite the Qur'an to a person who just read it from the *mushaf* (without reciting it to a *shaykh*), or *hadith* etc. from a person who acquired [*hadith*] by reading from the scripts.”³⁴

Al-Imam Al-Awza'i رحمه الله said that “this knowledge used to be noble, passed down [from men] to men, but when it entered the books the wrong people became involved in it.”³⁵

³⁴ *Sharh Al-Ihya*, Az-Zubaydee (1/66)

³⁵ *Siyar A'lam An-Nubala*, Adh-Dhahabi (7/114)

Chapter 3

The Etiquette of the Seeker with his Sheikh

18) Considering the status of the sheikh

The sheikh is the seeker's guide on the path of Sacred Knowledge and should be afforded the utmost respect, reverence, honor, appreciation and courtesy.

The seeker should display impeccable manners when in his company in consideration of (but not limited to) the following:

- i. The manners of sitting with him.
- ii. The manners of speaking to him.
- iii. The manners of listening to him.
- iv. Displaying good etiquette with the books you are reading to him.
- v. Overlooking his shortcomings.
- vi. Seeking his permission when one wants to study under another sheikh.

Likewise, the seeker should avoid the following

- i. Arguing in his presence with intent to show off.
- ii. Preceding him in speech.
- iii. Walking ahead of him.
- iv. Speaking excessively in his presence.
- v. Interrupting him.
- vi. Pestering him for answers to questions.
- vii. Extensively questioning him, especially in front of an audience.
- viii. Calling him by his name.
- ix. Irritating him or testing his patience.

The seeker should also be acutely aware of going to extremes that violate the Shari'ah in his behavior towards his Sheikh.

For while Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا

“Do not make [your] calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another...”³⁶

And Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

³⁶ Surat An-Nur 24:63

أَنَا سَيِّدُ وَلَدِ آدَمَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا فَخْرَ

"I am the master of the children of Adam on the Day of Judgement, and I am not boasting..."³⁷

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم also said

لَا تُطْرُونِي كَمَا أَطَرَتِ النَّصَارَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ، فَإِنَّمَا أَنَا عَبْدُهُ، فَقُولُوا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ
وَرَسُولُهُ

"Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Slave. So call me the Slave of Allah and His Messenger."³⁸

19) The seeker's capital is from his sheikh

Absorb and imitate the pious manners and noble conduct of the sheikh, for this is your capital. Any knowledge acquired above and beyond that is profit. The corollary is that the seeker should avoid imitating the sheikh superficially in matters that have no bearing on the acquisition of knowledge, whether with regard to dress, walk, manner of speech, gestures or the like.

20) The sheikh's enthusiasm during his lessons

The sheikh feeds off the energy and enthusiasm of his audience. The seeker should therefore remain alert and attentive, give his sheikh complete attention without letting his mind or gaze wonder.

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud رضى الله عنه said "Narrate (hadeeth etc.) to the audience as long as they glance at you with their eyes, and if you see slackness from them then halt."³⁹

21) Writing what the sheikh says during lessons or revision

The etiquette of taking notes is that the seeker notifies his sheikh that he will be writing. When writing, it is a condition that the seeker indicates that he has written what he heard from the sheikh during the lesson.

22) Acquiring knowledge from innovators

Al-Imam Adh-Dhahabi رحمه الله said that "If you see the innovating *mutakallim* saying: 'leave out the Quran and Sunnah and bring forth Logic', then know that he is Abu Jahl. And if you see the 'One on the Spiritual Path', [who claims that by practising a set of prescribed forms of innovated worship he will attain oneness with Allah] saying: 'Leave us from [knowledge] that is transmitted (i.e. the Quran and Sunnah) and bring forth the 'Taste and Ecstasy of Passion', then know that he is Iblis (Shaytan) become manifest in a human form, or has become incarnate within him; so if you become cowardly then run away from him, otherwise wrestle him down, and sit on his chest with your knee, and read Ayat Al-Kursi, and strangle him."

³⁷ Jami' At-Tirmidhi, hasan

³⁸ Sahih Al-Bukhari

³⁹ Al-Jami li Akhlaq Ar-Rawi wa Adab As-Sami, Al-Khateeb Al-Baghdadi (1/320)

Imam Malik رحمه الله said that “Knowledge (hadith) is not taken from four: a foolish person who publicises his foolishness, even if he was the most prolific narrator of hadith; a person of bid’ah who calls to it; a person who lies in his speech with people even if I don’t accuse him of lying in hadith.; and a noble, pious worshipper if he does not memorise precisely what he narrates.”⁴⁰

Chapter 4

The Etiquette of Companionship

23) Beware the bad companions

Allah سبحانه و يعلى says,

الْأَخْلَاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقِينَ

“Close friends, that Day, will be enemies to each other, except for the righteous”⁴¹

Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

الْأَرْوَاحُ جُنُودٌ مُجَنَّدَةٌ، فَمَا تَعَارَفَ مِنْهَا اثْتَلَفَ، وَمَا تَنَافَرَ مِنْهَا اخْتَلَفَ

“Souls are like conscripted soldiers. Those with like qualities incline towards one other, while those with disparate qualities are repelled.”⁴²

Hisham Ibn Abd Al-Malik رحمه الله said that “Nothing remains of the worldly pleasures except a brother [with] whom I raise the burden of taking precaution between me and him.”⁴³

There are three types of friends. The first two should be avoided while the third is deserving of your companionship due to mutual benefit.

- i. One who befriends you solely for his own welfare.
- ii. One who befriends you solely for fun.
- iii. One who befriends you for your virtue.

If the seeker is unable to find righteous companions he is better off choosing isolation (العزلة) but for two conditions, knowledge (لاعلم) and asceticism (الزهد). For without the ع of knowledge isolation becomes a mistake (زلة) and without the ز of asceticism it becomes a defect (علة).

⁴⁰ *Siyar A’lam An-Nubala*, Adh-Dhahabi (7/61)

⁴¹ Surat Az-Zukhruf 43:67

⁴² Sahih Al-Bukhari

⁴³ *Tabaqat An-Nassabin*, Bakr Abu Zayd, p. 31

Imam Abu Sulayman Al-Khattabi رحمه الله said “isolation only benefits the wise and the scholars; it is most dangerous for the ignorant.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Al-Uzla*, Al-Khattabi, p. 226

Chapter 5

The Etiquette of the Student in Leading a Life of Knowledge

24) Lofty aspirations

Having high aspirations will attract endless good from Allah that is never cut off. It causes the seeker to go from strength to strength and achieve mastery over mastery. It gives him endurance for his long and difficult journey in pursuit of Sacred Knowledge. It motivates him to continue learning and implementing what is learned. People will notice that his time and effort is only spent in virtuous pursuits and not in frivolity. It eliminates trivial hopes and actions, and uproots the weeds of humiliation, degradation, sycophantism and selling-out. The seeker with great aspirations is stoic and resolute in the face of adversity whereas one who has lost it, or never had it in the first place, is a fearful coward whose mouth is shut by his impotence. The latter is unfit and unworthy of being a vessel for Sacred Knowledge.

25) The burning desire to seek knowledge

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

وإن العلماء ورثة الأنبياء وإن الأنبياء لم يورثوا دينارًا ولا درهما وإنما ورثوا العلم. فمن أخذه أخذ بحظ وافر

“The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets who bequeath neither dinar nor dirham, only knowledge. Whosoever acquires it has acquired an abundant portion.”⁴⁵

It is reported that Ali Ibn Abi Talib رضي الله عنه said that “The true worth of a person is in his mastery.” (i.e. of something.)

It is said that “over every learned one, is one more learned.”

26) Travelling to seek knowledge

It is said that “whoever is not strong enough to travel, will not be travelled to.” (i.e. by the seekers of knowledge.)

It is unlikely that someone who does not travel to seek knowledge will reach the level of an erudite scholar who others travel to for the purpose of learning.

⁴⁵ Sunan Abi Dawud, Jami' At-Tirmidhi

Al-Imam Ash-Shafi'i رحمه الله said,

“No rest in residence for the cultured and intellectual,
So travel and leave where you're residing!

Travel! You will find replacement for what's left
And strive! For the sweetness of life is in striving!

I've seen that water stagnates if still, becomes pure if it runs,
But not if it doesn't flow,

If the lion leaves not his den he cannot hunt
And the arrow strikes not, without leaving its bow,

If the sun stood still in its heavenly course
Then people, Arab and Ajam, would bore

Gold dust is as soil where commonly found,
And in its land, Oud is but wood in store,

If one travels, sought out is he,
If one travels, honored like gold is he.”⁴⁶

Sheikh Abdul Aziz At-Tarifi حفظه الله said during an interview that travelling to seek knowledge from scholars of different backgrounds and scholarly traditions broadens one's horizons, teaches respect for difference of opinion and teaches giving the benefit of the doubt (حسن الظن) towards those who differ with you.⁴⁷

27) Preserving knowledge through writing⁴⁸

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

قيّدوا العلم بالكتاب

“Bind knowledge by writing.”⁴⁹

And Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم reportedly said,

اسْتَعِزْ بِيَمِينِكَ

“Seek help with your right hand” (and motioned with his hand صلى الله عليه وسلم as if writing.)⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Not a verbatim translation; poetic license used.

⁴⁷ [Sheikh At-Tarifi speaks about his journey to India in pursuit of knowledge](#)

⁴⁸ *Al-Jami li Akhlaq Ar-Rawi wa Adab As-Sami*, Al-Khateeb Al-Baghdadi (2/16, 183-185)

⁴⁹ *As-Silsilat As-Sahihah*, Al-Albani, hadith #2026

⁵⁰ Jami At-Tirmidhi, Da'if

28) Preserving knowledge through paying it attention

Allah سبحانه و يعلى says,

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ

“Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture?”⁵¹

And He سبحانه و يعلى says,

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern...”⁵²

Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ النَّاسِ يُقْضَىٰ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَيْهِ... وَرَجُلٌ تَعَلَّمَ الْعِلْمَ وَعَلَّمَهُ وَقَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ فَأُتِيَ بِهِ فَعَرَّفَهُ نِعَمَهُ فَعَرَفَهَا قَالَ فَمَا عَمِلْتُ فِيهَا قَالَ تَعَلَّمْتَ الْعِلْمَ وَعَلَّمْتُهُ وَقَرَأْتَ فِيكَ الْقُرْآنَ . قَالَ كَذَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّكَ تَعَلَّمْتَ الْعِلْمَ لِيُقَالَ عَالِمٌ . وَقَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ لِيُقَالَ هُوَ قَارِئٌ . فَقَدْ قِيلَ ثُمَّ أُمِرَ بِهِ فَسُحِبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ حَتَّىٰ أُلْقِيَ فِي النَّارِ

“Among the first of those to be judged on the Day of Recompense are...a man who sought knowledge, disseminated it and recited the Quran. He will be brought forth and made to recount his blessings, so he will recount them. Allah will say to him ‘what have you done with them?’ and he will reply ‘I sought knowledge, disseminated it and recited the Quran for your sake alone.’ Allah will say to him ‘you have lied! You sought knowledge so that it might be said that ‘he is a scholar’ and you recited the Quran so that it might be said that ‘he is a reciter.’ Thus, it was said.’ Then orders will be given and he will be dragged on his face and cast into the Fire.”⁵³

And Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم reportedly said,

مَنْ طَلَبَ الْعِلْمَ لِيُجَارِيَ بِهِ الْعُلَمَاءَ أَوْ لِيُمَارِيَ بِهِ السُّفَهَاءَ أَوْ يَصْرِفَ بِهِ وَجْهَهُ النَّاسَ إِلَيْهِ أَدْخَلَهُ اللَّهُ النَّارَ

“Whosoever seeks knowledge to contend with the scholars, to argue with the foolish or to gain people’s attention shall be cast by Allah into the Fire.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Surat Al-Baqara 2:44

⁵² Surat Al-Ahzab 33:21

⁵³ Sahih Muslim

⁵⁴ Jami At-Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Maja, Da’if

And Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم reportedly said,

مَنْ طَلَبَ الْعِلْمَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَرَادَ بِهِ غَيْرَ اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَبَوَّأْ مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

"Whosoever seeks knowledge for other than Allah's sake or intends it for a purpose other than Allah's sake let him take his place in the Fire."⁵⁵

Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi رحمه الله said that "it is incumbent upon the seeker of knowledge to purify his intention in seeking knowledge, which should be: 'achieving the pleasure of Allah.' He should beware of making it a way to achieve materialistic gain and a way of gaining [worldly] compensation; for the penalty of such has been set aside for the one who seeks that with his knowledge."

29) Preserving knowledge through revision

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

تَعَاهَدُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَهُو أَشَدُّ تَفَلُّثًا مِنَ الْإِبِلِ فِي عَقْلِهَا

"Revise the Quran regularly, for by the One in whose hand is Muhammad's soul it escapes from memory faster than a camel from its fetters."⁵⁶

Al-Hafidh Ibn Abd Al-Barr رحمه الله said: "In this hadith is a proof that whosoever does not revise his knowledge will lose it, whoever he may be, because their knowledge at that time was the Quran and nothing else. So if the Quran which has been made easy to remember is lost without revision, what about other types of knowledge? Furthermore, the best type of knowledge is that which has its foundations perfected and its branches memorized and that which leads to Allah and what pleases Him." It was said by some [scholars]: "Every glory not emphasized by knowledge then humiliation is its destiny."⁵⁷

30) Gaining understanding through the exercise of deriving rulings by applying the fundamental principles to various issues

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

نُضِرَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا سَمِعَ مِنْ شَيْئًا فَبَلَّغَهُ كَمَا سَمِعَهُ فَرُبَّ مَبْلُغٍ أَوْعَى مِنْ سَامِعٍ

"May Allah illuminate the face of one who hears something from us and communicates it to others exactly as he has heard it, for it may be that the recipient of knowledge understands it better than the one who has heard it."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Sunan Ibn Maja, Da'if

⁵⁶ Agreed upon

⁵⁷ *Sharh Al-Ihya*, Az-Zubaydi (1/93)

⁵⁸ Mutawatir

Imam Ibn Al-Khayr رحمه الله commented that “(in this hadith) is an indication that fiqh is extrapolation and comprehending the meanings (of the texts.) It implicitly illustrates the obligation of learning jurisprudence, searching for the meanings ahadith and deriving its hidden secrets.”⁵⁹

One of the means to this ‘understanding’ is the act of contemplation which is mandated on man by Allah in many verses of the Quran. Contemplation strengthens faith, exercises the intellect, deepens understanding and leads to the acquirement of knowledge.

Allah سبحانه و يعلى says,

كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

“Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you might use reason.”⁶⁰

And He سبحانه و يعلى says,

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ ۚ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“Say, ‘Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Then will you not give thought?’”⁶¹

The seeker who embodies vision and contemplation, towards gaining understanding, may eclipse the level of the jurists (فقيه) and become a man of insight (فقيه النفس) who melds the rulings with the overarching fundamentals of the Shariah (مقاصد الشريعة).

31) Seeking refuge in Allah when seeking knowledge

The seeker should never become discouraged if a particular subject is difficult for him. Rather, he should supplicate to Allah for assistance and ask Him to grant knowledge and understanding.

Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا، يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ

“For whosoever Allah wills well, He bestows comprehension of the religion.”⁶²

Whenever Imam Ibn Taymiyya رحمه الله found a verse of the Quran impenetrable, he would supplicate to Allah saying “O Teacher of Adam and Ibrahim, teach me! O You who made Sulaiman understand, grant me understanding!” and its access would be granted.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Fihrist Ibn Al-Khayr*, p. 9

⁶⁰ Surat Al-Baqara 2:242

⁶¹ Surat Al-An’am 6:50

⁶² *Muttafaqun alayh*

⁶³ *Majmu Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya* (4/38)

32) Intellectual Honesty

“For indeed the success of the Ummah lies in the righteousness of its actions, the righteousness of its actions lies in the correctness of its knowledge and the correctness of its knowledge lies in its men being honest in what they narrate or explain. So whosoever speaks about knowledge without honesty has inflicted a wound upon knowledge, and it is as if he has placed a rock to obstruct the path of the Ummah to success.

No group of specialists in any field is free of those who neither seek knowledge in order to beautify themselves with the highest virtue nor in order to benefit the people and you discover that such people are dishonest. They have no shame narrating what they did not hear or explaining what they do not know. This is what caused the great scholars to criticize men and to distinguish between those who exaggerate in their speech and those who speak according to what they know. It was this criticism that led the seekers of knowledge to become aware of the value of what they read as well as its status and become able to decisively distinguish truth from falsehood, or whether that which they read was predominantly true, false or a mixture of both.”⁶⁴

33) Truthfulness

Al-Imam Al-Awza'i رحمه الله reportedly said “learn truthfulness before learning knowledge.”

Imam Waki' Ibn Al-Jarrah reportedly said that “this profession only raises a truthful one.” (i.e. the profession of hadith)

With regard to matters of the religion, lying is of three types:

- i. The lies of the groveler that opposes reality and belief, such as one who grovels to a person he knows is sinful or an innovator.
- ii. The lies of the hypocrite that oppose (his internal) belief but are in accordance with reality, such as a hypocrite who pretends to be a Muslim.
- iii. The lies of the foolish that oppose reality but are in accordance with belief, such as one who calls a known heretic a ‘loved one of Allah’ (ولي الله).

The seeker should refrain from using tawriya (تورية) ambiguous speech by which the listener understands something other than the meaning intended by the speaker, in a manner other than that which is allowed in the Shariah.

34) The seeker's shield

Imam Malik رحمه الله said “the shield of the scholar is saying ‘I don't know.’ If he lowers it his enemies strike him.”⁶⁵

Imam Muhammad Ibn Sirin رحمه الله said “for a man to die in a state of ignorance is better than for him to speak about that which he has no knowledge.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Rasa'il Al-Islah*, Husayn, Muhammad Al-Khidr (1/13)

⁶⁵ *Hilyat Al-Awliya*, Abu Nu'aym Al-Asfahani (6/323)

⁶⁶ *Jami' Bayan Al-Ilm wa Fadlih*, Ibn Abd Al-Barr (2/54)

35) Preserving one's time

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَالْعَصْرِ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

“By time, indeed, mankind is in loss...”⁶⁷

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

نِعْمَتَانِ مَغْبُورٌ فِيهِمَا كَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ، الصِّحَّةُ وَالْفَرَاغُ

“The two blessings that many people squander are good health and free time.”⁶⁸

And Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه و سلم said,

اِغْتَنِمْ خَمْسًا قَبْلَ خَمْسٍ حَيَاتِكَ قَبْلَ مَوْتِكَ وَ صِحَّتَكَ قَبْلَ سَقَمِكَ وَ فَرَاغَكَ قَبْلَ شُغْلِكَ وَ شَبَابَكَ قَبْلَ هَرَمِكَ وَ غِنَاكَ قَبْلَ فَقْرِكَ

“Take advantage of five matters before five others: your life before death, your health before illness, your free time before preoccupation, your youth before old age and your wealth before poverty.”⁶⁹

Al-Imam Ash-Shafi'i رحمه الله said “I accompanied the ascetics and benefited from them in two matters. I heard them say ‘time is a sword; if you do not cut it, then it will cut you’ and ‘your soul; if you do not preoccupy your soul with truth then you will be preoccupied by falsehood.’”⁷⁰

36) Relaxation and recreation

Ali Ibn Abi Talib رضي الله عنه said “relax the hearts and seek subtle wisdoms for them, for they become bored as bodies do.”⁷¹

Imam Ibn Taymiyya رحمه الله said “in the prohibition of praying general supererogatory prayers during the abhorred times are additional advantages such as relaxation of the body at intervals from the weightiness of worship, as one would relax by sleeping and other forms [of relaxation], and for this reason Muadh (Ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه said ‘indeed I seek reward for my sleep just as I do when awake...’”⁷²

The concept of taking weekends off was widespread since early times and mentioned in biographies as well as books on the etiquette of teaching.⁷³

⁶⁷ Surat Al-‘Asr 103:1-2

⁶⁸ Sahih Al-Bukhari

⁶⁹ Sahih Al-Jami, Al-Albani, hadith #1077

⁷⁰ Madarij As-Salikin, Ibn Al-Qayyim (3/128)

⁷¹ Jami Bayan Al-Ilm wa Fadlih, Ibn Abd Al-Barr

⁷² Majmu Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya (23/187)

⁷³ Adab Al-Mu'allimin, Ibn Suhrun, Muhammad, p.104

37) Precision and Corrective Recital

The seeker should covet precision in reading and frequently read to a proficient sheikh to achieve this. In doing so he protects himself from mistakes that lead to distortion of the meanings of text and ultimately incorrect understanding.

The biographies of the scholars abound with examples of those that read voluminous works to their teachers in entirety. For example, Al-Hafidh Ibn Hajar رحمه الله read Sahih Al-Bukhari in ten sessions, each ten hours long, Sahih Muslim in four sessions over two days, Sunan Ibn Maja in four sessions and Mu'jam At-Tabarani As-Saghir in one sitting between the dhuhr and 'asr prayers.

38) Summarizing voluminous works through reading

The seeker should develop the ability to summarize large works as it exercises his mind in identifying core material, broadens his understanding, helps him unlock unique benefits, gain experience in cross-referencing and familiarity with the literary styles of different authors.

39) The etiquette of asking questions

The seeker should ask questions with impeccable manners. When he receives an answer he should refrain from saying "but sheikh so-and-so said such-and-such..." instead say "what would you say about such-and-such opinion..." without naming.

Ibn Al-Qayyim رحمه الله said, "It was said that 'if you sit with a scholar, ask to gain understanding and do not go to extremes.'"⁷⁴

He also said that "there are six levels of knowledge:

- i. The first is excellence in asking questions.
- ii. The second is excellence paying attention and listening.
- iii. The third is excellence in understanding.
- iv. The fourth is memorizing.
- v. The fifth is teaching.
- vi. The sixth and this is the fruit of knowledge, is implementing it and appreciating its boundaries."⁷⁵

40) Debating without arguing⁷⁶

Debating in order to arrive at the truth is favorable. The basis of a true debate is sincere advice (نصيحة) forbearance and spreading knowledge. Its result is that the truth is uplifted over falsehood.

Argument or dispute is abhorrent. Dispute during conversation or debate is nothing more than quarrel, showing off, pride, enmity and a struggle to be victorious. The seeker should beware dispute and whoever engages in it, turning away from it in order to save himself from sin.

⁷⁴ *Miftah Dar As-Sa'ada*, Ibn Al-Qayyim, p. 184

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Majmu Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya* (24/172-174)

41) Revising in groups

The seeker should benefit from study-groups as they have advantages over solitary revision. A difficult issue may be explained by one with insight into it or discussed as a group in order to unravel it and all those present from the collective intellect of the group.

42) The seeker of knowledge lives between the texts of the Quran and Sunnah and the knowledge associated with them.

They are the two wings of the seeker and he should take care that he doesn't become broken winged.

43) Learning the tools of every subject

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۖ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِهِ
فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

“Those to whom We have given the Book recite it with its true recital. They [are the ones who] believe in it. And whoever disbelieves in it - it is they who are the losers.”⁷⁷

The seeker shouldn't leave the study of a subject before perfecting it, where perfection requires that he master both the subject and its foundational theory. As such he combines mastery of law (فقه) and legal theory (عصول الفقه), Prophetic traditions (حديث) and theory of Prophetic traditions (عصول الحديث) and so on, for each of the Sacred Sciences.

⁷⁷ Surat Al-Baqara 2:121

Chapter 6

Adornment through Implementation

44) The signs of beneficial knowledge

The signs of beneficial knowledge are as follows:

- i. Implementing what is learned.
- ii. Hatred of being praised or displaying haughtiness.
- iii. Increasing in modesty as knowledge increases.
- iv. Fleeing from the love of leadership, notoriety and worldly pleasures.
- v. Abandoning any claim to being knowledgeable.
- vi. Having a poor opinion of oneself and a favorable opinion of others, so as to steer clear of disparagement.

45) The alms (zakah) of knowledge

The alms of knowledge are as follows:

- i. Openly proclaiming the truth.
- ii. Promoting virtue and preventing vice.
- iii. Weighing the benefits and harms.
- iv. Disseminating knowledge.
- v. Benefiting people and the love of doing so.
- vi. Sacrificing honor.
- vii. Interceding on behalf of the Muslims for just causes and the common weal.

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

إذا مات ابن آدم انقطع عمله إلا من ثلاث: صدقة جارية، أو علم ينتفع به، أو ولد صالح يدعو له

“When the son of Adam dies his deeds halt but for three: ceaseless charity, beneficial knowledge or a righteous son who supplicates for him.”⁷⁸

The scholars said that “these three are not combined except within a scholar who spends his knowledge; because his spending it is charity which is benefited from, and the receiver of it is a (metaphorical) child of this scholar by way of learning.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Sahih Muslim

⁷⁹ Tadhkirat As-Sami' wa 'l-Mutakallim, Ibn Jama'a

46) The honor of the scholars

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

من سلك طريقًا يبتغي فيه علمًا سهل الله له طريقًا إلى الجنة، وإن الملائكة لتضع أجنحتها لطالب العلم رضا بما صنع، وإن العالم ليستغفر له من في السماوات والأرض حتى الحيتان في الماء، وفضل العالم على العابد كفضل القمر على سائر الكواكب، وإن العلماء ورثة الأنبياء وإن الأنبياء لم يورثوا دينارًا ولا درهما وإنما ورثوا العلم. فمن أخذه أخذ بحظ وافر

“Whosoever treads a path in quest of knowledge, Allah will ease for him the path to Paradise. The angels lower their wings over the seeker of knowledge, being pleased with what he does. The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, even the fish in the depths of the oceans seek forgiveness for him. The superiority of the scholar over the devout worshipper is like that of the full moon to the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets who bequeath neither dinar nor dirham, only knowledge and he who acquires it, has in fact acquired an abundant portion.”⁸⁰

The seeker should internalize the sanctity of the knowledge bestowed upon him and treat it with the respect it deserves. If he honors it, it will cause him to be honored.

He should beware the schemes of the wealthy and powerful who attempt to manipulate or bend scholars to their will. He should not sell the sacred knowledge bestowed upon him for a meager price. He should not disseminate it to those unworthy of receiving it, no matter their status.

47) Protection of Knowledge

Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

اَحْفَظْ اللَّهَ يَحْفَظْكَ، اَحْفَظْ اللَّهَ تَجِدْهُ تُجَاهَكَ

“Be mindful of Allah and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you...”⁸¹

The seeker who achieves status or position should be mindful of the knowledge that helped him reach such a rank. He should beware the disease of protecting his position at the expense of the mandate of scholarship, speaking the Truth and standing for justice at all times.

⁸⁰ Sunan Abi Dawud, Jami At-Tirmidhi

⁸¹ Jami At-Tirmidhi

48)Diplomacy, not concession

Selling out is a despicable characteristic. Diplomacy is not. The seeker should never conflate the two and be lead down the path of hypocrisy.⁸²

49)Passion for books

Just as the seeker should possess an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, he should be a connoisseur of books and have a desire to amass a scrupulously selected library.

50)The foundation of the seeker's library

The seeker will benefit most from those books written by authors who tend to discuss matters with great detail and critical analysis of proofs, arguments and conclusions.

51) How to read books

The seeker should be aware of any specific terminology used by the author in a particular work, usually mentioned in the foreword. As such, he should start reading from the foreword.

52) Before putting a new book on the shelf

Whenever the seeker purchases a book he should skim it, read the foreword and index or a few excerpts from it before storing it in his library. If not, he may forget about the book and a long time will pass before he gets around to reading it.

53)Writing with diacritical marks (التشكيل)

The seeker should write with diacritical marks in order to achieve clarity and remove obscurity.

Obscurity may be removed in several ways:

- i. Strong penmanship.
- ii. Adhering to the rules of writing (الإملاء.)
- iii. Placing diacritical marks on those letters that require them and leaving those that don't.
- iv. Placing diacritical marks on obscure words.
- v. Writing the references of Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions.

⁸² *Rawdat Al-Uqala*, Ibn Hibban, p. 70; *Al-Ghuraba*, Al-Ajuriy, p. 79-80

Chapter 6

Precautions

54) Delusions of grandeur

The seeker should beware claiming knowledge in something not known or proficiency where he has none.

55) Beware being an ‘Abu Shibr’⁸³ (‘the man of a span’)

They say that knowledge is of three spans: whosoever enters the first becomes arrogant, whosoever enters the second becomes humble and whosoever enters the third realizes that he knows nothing.

56) Beware becoming manifest before becoming qualified

It is said that “whosoever manifests himself before his time has manifested himself to humiliation.”

57) Being like a leopard showing off its spots (التنمر بالعلم)

This is a type of boastfulness where a person of limited knowledge will revise a particular subject and bring it up in a gathering for discussion in order to dazzle the audience. Like the leopard, his coat is spotted and incomplete. *Unlike* the leopard, however, whose coat is a positive attribute, it is a major defect in the one who possesses this trait.

58) Merely putting pen to paper

The seeker should refrain from writing books until he has fully matured on the path of knowledge, acquiring mastery of most, if not all the Sacred Sciences at the hands of his teachers.

For the one who is qualified, beneficial writing is one of the noblest pursuits a man of virtue may engage in. Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi رحمه الله said “whosoever writes a book, has put his mind on a platter and served it to the people.”

59) Your attitude towards the mistakes of your predecessors

It is a characteristic of pseudo-scholars (متعالم) to cause controversy regarding the mistakes of scholars who preceded them, using these human errors to degrade them. “He wants to treat a minor cold but it ends up turning into leprosy.”⁸⁴

60) Defense against doubts⁸⁵

Don’t believe everything you read or hear and avoid raising doubts in your mind and that of others, for hearts are weak and open to manipulation.

⁸³ *Tadhkirat As-Sami wa ‘l-Mutakallim*, Ibn Jama’a, p. 65

⁸⁴ *Majma’ Al-Balagha*, Ar-Raghib Al-Asfahani

⁸⁵ *Miftah Dar As-Sa’ada*, Ibn Al-Qayyim, p. 153

61) Beware grammatical errors

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab رضى الله عنه said “learn Arabic, for it increases honor.”⁸⁶

There are narrations which state that our predecessors used to hit their children if they made grammatical errors.⁸⁷

Al-Rahbi رحمه الله said “I heard some of our peers say ‘if a person who makes grammatical errors writes from another like him, and he writes from another person like him, the hadith will end up in Persian!’”⁸⁸

Al-Mubarrid رحمه الله said,

“Grammar straightens the tongue that’s ungrammatical
And you honor the man, whose errors are none,

If you seek the greatest of knowledge
Then the greatest is that which straightens the tongue.”⁸⁹

62) Half-baked intellectualism

The seeker should beware introducing innovative thoughts or ideologies before they are fully developed.

63) Beware the ‘new’ Judaica (الإسرائيليات)⁹⁰

Allah’s Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said,

لَا تُصَدِّقُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ، وَلَا تَكْذِبُوهُمْ {قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ} الْآيَةِ

“Do not believe the people of the Scripture, and do not disbelieve them, but say, 'We believe in Allah and whatever has been revealed...’”⁹¹⁹²

64) Beware Byzantine debate⁹³

Upon hearing a group of people arguing Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri رحمه الله said “these people have become bored with worship, speech has become light upon their tongue, and their piety has decreased. That is why they speak.”⁹⁴

⁸⁶ *Al-Jami’ li Akhlaq Ar-Rawi wa Adab As-Sami*, Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi (2/25)

⁸⁷ *Al-Jami’ li Akhlaq Ar-Rawi wa Adab As-Sami*, Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi (2/28,29)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *Maqasid Ash-Shar’iyyat Al-Islamiyya*, Al-Fasi, Allal, p. b

⁹¹ Surat Aali ‘Imran 3:84

⁹² *Sahih Al-Bukhari*

⁹³ *Mu’jam At-Tarakib*, Abu Sa’d, Ahmad, p. 280

⁹⁴ *Kitab Az-Zuhd*, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal; *Hilyat Al-Awliya*, Abu Nu’aym Al-Asfahani

65)The people of Islam have no distinguishing features except Islam and being safe [from all that which opposes it]

Allah سبحانه و تعالى says,

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ

“He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus - to establish the religion and not be divided therein...”⁹⁵

And He سبحانه و تعالى says,

وَمَا تَفَرَّقُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَيْنَهُمْ

“And they did not become divided until after knowledge had come to them - out of jealous animosity between themselves...”⁹⁶

Hudhayfa Ibn Al-Yaman رضي الله عنه narrated,

حُذَيْفَةُ بْنُ الْيَمَانِ يَقُولُ كَانَ النَّاسُ يَسْأَلُونَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
عَنِ الْخَيْرِ، وَكُنْتُ أَسْأَلُهُ عَنِ الشَّرِّ مَخَافَةً أَنْ يُدْرِكَنِي. فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنَّا
كُنَّا فِي جَاهِلِيَّةٍ وَشَرٍّ، فَجَاءَنَا اللَّهُ بِهَذَا الْخَيْرِ، فَهَلْ بَعْدَ هَذَا الْخَيْرِ مِنْ شَرٍّ
قَالَ " نَعَمْ ". قُلْتُ وَهَلْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ الشَّرِّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ قَالَ " نَعَمْ، وَفِيهِ دَخْنٌ ".
قُلْتُ وَمَا دَخْنُهُ قَالَ " قَوْمٌ يَهْدُونَ بَغِيرَ هَدْيِي تَعْرِفُ مِنْهُمْ وَتُنْكِرُ ". قُلْتُ فَهَلْ
بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ الْخَيْرِ مِنْ شَرٍّ قَالَ " نَعَمْ دُعَاءُ إِلَى أَبْوَابِ جَهَنَّمَ، مَنْ أَجَابَهُمْ إِلَيْهَا
قَذَفُوهُ فِيهَا ". قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صِفْهُمْ لَنَا فَقَالَ " هُمْ مِنْ جِلْدَتِنَا، وَيَتَكَلَّمُونَ
بِأَلْسِنَتِنَا " قُلْتُ فَمَا تَأْمُرُنِي إِنْ أَدْرَكَنِي ذَلِكَ قَالَ " تَلْزِمُ جَمَاعَةَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ
وَأِمَامَهُمْ ". قُلْتُ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ جَمَاعَةٌ وَلَا إِمَامٌ قَالَ " فَاعْتَزِلْ تِلْكَ الْفِرْقَ
كُلَّهَا، وَلَوْ أَنْ تَعَصَّ بِأَصْلِ شَجَرَةٍ حَتَّى يُدْرِكَكَ الْمَوْتُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ

⁹⁵ Surat Ash-Shura 42:13

⁹⁶ Surat Ash-Shura 42:14

“The people used to ask Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) about good, but I used to ask him about evil for fear that it might overtake me. Once I said, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! We were in ignorance and evil and Allah has bestowed upon us the present good; will there be any evil after this good?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "Will there be good after that evil?" He said, "Yes, but it would be tainted with Dakhan (i.e. some evil)." I asked, "What will its Dakhan be?" He said, "There will be some people who will lead (people) according to principles other than my tradition. You will see their actions and disapprove of them." I said, "Will there be any evil after that good?" He said, "Yes, there will be some people who will invite others to the doors of Hell, and whoever accepts their invitation to it will be thrown in it (by them)." I said, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! Describe those people to us." He said, "They will belong to us and speak our language" I asked, "What do you order me to do if such a thing should take place in my life?" He said, "Adhere to the group of Muslims and their Chief." I asked, "If there is neither a group (of Muslims) nor a chief (what shall I do)?" He said, "Keep away from all those different sects, even if you had to bite (i.e. eat) the root of a tree, till you meet Allah while you are still in that state."⁹⁷

66)The nullifiers of this Regalia

Among those things that disrobe the seeker of his regalia are the following:

- i. Disclosing secrets.
- ii. Spreading rumors.
- iii. Pompousness and lying.
- iv. Excessive joking.
- v. Interrupting people who are speaking.
- vi. Spite.
- vii. Jealousy.
- viii. Having a poor opinion of others.
- ix. Fraternizing with deviants.
- x. Striding towards the unlawful.

The seeker should beware the above sins and their derivatives, restraining himself from all that is unlawful. Rather, the people of scrupulous piety (الورع) make their limits the recommended (المستحبات) and abhorred (المكروهات).

What is correct in this abridgement is from Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and what is wrong is from ourselves and Satan.

May Allah make our steps firm and grant us all piety and success in the Last and the First [life].

May the blessings and salutations of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and his Companions.

وصلی اللہ و سلم علی نبینا محمد و علی آلہ و أصحابہ أجمعین